

5-4-1993

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Recommended Citation

"Charles Wells, UD MIS Professor, Wins 1993 Alumni Award for Teaching" (1993). *News Releases*. 7955.
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The University of Dayton

News Release

May 4, 1993

Contact: Teri Rizvi

CHARLES WELLS, UD MIS PROFESSOR, WINS 1993 ALUMNI AWARD FOR TEACHING

DAYTON, Ohio -- Charles Wells, a management information science and decision sciences professor at the University of Dayton, has won UD's 1993 Alumni Award for Teaching.

Part of Wells' goal when he teaches classes in statistics and computer-based mathematical modeling is to get students to think for themselves. As Wells discusses the model used to figure the mean of a family's food expenditures in a recent class, he tries hard not to make anyone feel foolish for asking a question.

"Did everybody hear that question?" he asks, pointing to the student. "Because that's exactly the kinds of thoughts everybody has to go through to understand that question."

Knowing that students are sometimes shy to speak out in large classes, Wells punctuates his responses with "I'm glad you asked" or "That's a good question."

Wells' efforts to make students comfortable stems from a teaching philosophy built around one word: respect. He respects the students and the subject matter he's teaching them.

"When one considers that those ideas have been around and have been in a way nurtured for hundreds of years, it kind of puts a new spin on it than just taking a book to a calculus class," said Wells, who's been in the department of MIS and decision sciences since 1984.

"Clearly the content of the course is an important factor, but in a sense the most important factors lie outside the content of the course," Wells said. "If my students walk out of the class with a sense of self-reliance, being able to learn things with an understanding that

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learning is not a process by which you have these revelations, but in fact there's a great deal of perseverance involved. . .then I've probably done much more than teach them a topic in statistics, and that would be much more important to me."

Acknowledging those who have influenced his teaching is also important to Wells. The third winner from the MIS department for the Alumni Award for Teaching, Wells considers himself fortunate for the teaching input he has received from colleagues -- especially Jim Dunne and Prabuddha De.

"This is certainly the biggest thrill of my professional life," said Wells, who is also an active researcher and has published some 40 scholarly articles. "It's a real kick. As far as my own self-satisfaction factor, it will make me smile for awhile."

All the seriousness Wells attaches to the subject matter and the students' learning doesn't mean he can't have fun in the classroom. Since some of his classes are large, Wells works hard to keep the students involved by maintaining eye contact with them as he flips through overhead projection sheets detailing formulas and problems. Students follow along in textbooks that have the same examples. When he asks a question, the students have no choice but to answer.

"I kiddingly keep what I call the 'stubborn chair,'" he said. "And when students don't respond, I get in my chair and say 'I'll sit here and stare back at you until something happens.'"

It doesn't take long for that something to occur. He reached for the chair once during class and quickly got an answer to his question. Wells' sense of humor and ability to let himself go keeps the class responding to the material.

"I try not to take myself too seriously because when I do the class bogs down," Wells said. "I try to stay enthusiastic and put energy into the class."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles Wells resides in Tipp City. For interviews, call (513) 229-3332.